SUMMER PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT:
Creating a Foundation for Teacher Relationships

Promising Practices from Washington State

Sivan Tuchman

DATABILITY EDUCATION CONSULTING

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SUMMER PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT:
Creating a Foundation for Teacher Relationships

Ensuring professional development focuses on creating a foundation of strong teacher relationships and school culture can be a way to increase its potential impact on teachers and, eventually, students. Relevant professional development, designed by school leaders and staff, helps engage teachers in professional development.

CASE STUDY SCHOOL

This guide describes a practice being implemented at Catalyst Public Schools (Catalyst). Catalyst is located in Bremerton, Washington and serves students in kindergarten to high school. The public charter school opened in September 2020. In 2023–24, Catalyst enrolled 485 students, 47% of whom were classified as low-income, and 16% of whom received special education services. For additional information, see appendix A.

Practice Overview

What is this Practice?

In this guide, we discuss how professional development can be used to create a strong school culture, which lays the foundation for effective teaching practices. Schools hold several weeks of summer professional development, prioritizing staff relationships within a framework of belonging and inclusion. New staff attend for one week before returning staff arrive for an additional two weeks. Teachers spend time building cultural competencies to mitigate biases when working with peers and students who have different lived experiences from their own.

KEY ACTIONS FOR BUILDING STAFF RELATIONSHIPS

1. Develop norms around trust and respect for one another.
2. Create opportunities for staff to share details about themselves as educators and people.
3. Hold space for difficult conversations about race, privilege, and oppression to create an inclusive environment for everyone.
4. Schedule time for fun and laughter.

SCHOOL PRACTICE: MENTOR CENTER

- **Implementation Level:** School, Network/district
- **Who Implements:** School leaders, Network/district leaders
- **Practice Area:** Teacher professional learning
- **Practice Outcome(s):**

  Teachers: satisfaction, positive school culture, improved teaching practices (short-term), retention (long-term)
 **Students:** increased student achievement (long-term)

How is it Innovative?

This practice focuses on improving teacher relationships and building school culture. The average teacher spends 19 days a year in professional development.[1] Most professional development, however, focuses only on teaching practice without considering the importance of school culture. Without strong staff relationships and alignment around school culture, staff can lack the real and/or perceived support of their colleagues, students may experience different expectations from staff members, and conflict can arise between staff.

Catalyst Public Schools use the National Equity Project's Seven Circle Model (figure 1) as a conceptual framework for their relationship-building work. This model considers both the relational aspects (relationships, identity, and information) and the technical aspects (structure, pattern, and process) of an organization. This model adapts Margaret Wheatley and Dalmau Consulting's Six Circle Model to include the role that conditions of oppression play in an organization.

FIGURE 1. *National Equity Project's Seven Circle Model*
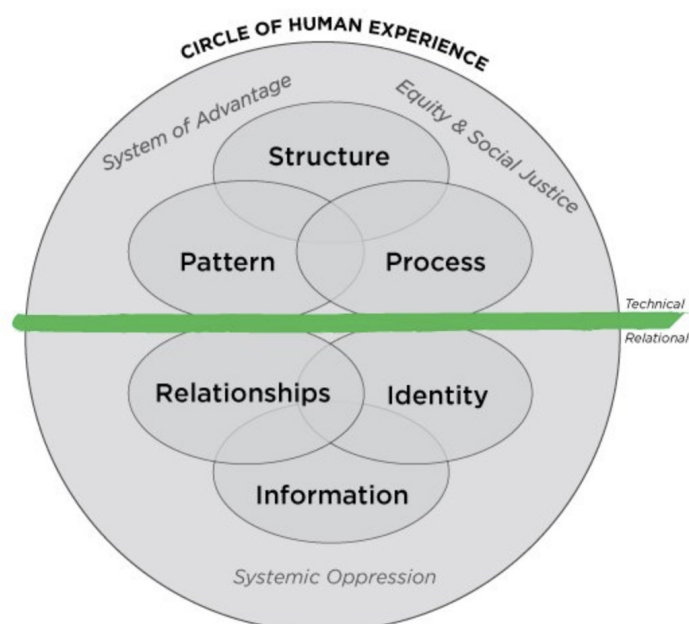
The model informs how Catalyst uses their professional development time. Typical professional development goes straight into the technical aspects of teaching without considering either the relational aspects or the ways in which oppression can be experienced at school. At Catalyst, school leaders designed summer professional development to create a relational foundation rooted in diversity, equity, and inclusion. Reframing professional development with these in mind can help teachers build the knowledge and skills they need to work effectively with colleagues and students who have different lived experiences than their own. This helps staff align around structures and processes that foster productive instructional practices. Catalyst's leaders designed the school with an understanding that systems of oppression play a role in everyone's lives and that these systems must be addressed for learning environments to be successful.

Though most of summer professional development is spent building relationships with other school staff, time is also devoted to technical aspects of teaching, like school policy, curriculum, and behavior management systems — in other words, topics "above the green line" in figure 1.

What is the Evidence?

What is the benefit of professional development?

Teacher Retention

Positive relationships between staff members can mitigate the effects of challenging working conditions and increase teacher satisfaction[2] and motivation,[3] thus improving retention. When teachers perceive that their relationships with peers are collaborative and respectful, teachers are more likely to stay at their school.[4]

Teacher Quality

Solid teacher relationships can have substantial benefits for students. Having "trust, respect, and a collective commitment to upholding school values and expectations" helps teachers be more effective at driving student learning.[5] Building strong staff relationships early in the school year can help teachers build social capital, which they can use to access resources to improve their teaching[6] — such as advice to address student challenges, texts for a struggling reader, or support on how to address concerns with administration. Teachers tend to be more effective in schools where they receive support and feedback.[7] Strong relationships are likely even more beneficial for new teachers,[8] who are adapting to a new organization and school model.

Cultivating cultural competencies can also improve teaching practices,[9] as teachers are more able to advocate for resources and policies that support student needs.[10]

BELONGING

Diversity is a fact.
Equity is a choice.
Inclusion is an action.
Belonging is an outcome.

ARTHUR CHAN

What isn't working about current approaches to professional development?

Researchers struggle to determine what types of professional development actually do improve teacher quality. Professional development does not always guarantee that teachers will implement practices with fidelity, and teachers may lack opportunities to implement what they learn. A significant portion of professional development is delivered by individuals outside of the local education context and is short-term in duration.[11] Consequently, professional development is often weakly aligned with and integrated into existing school practices and culture. In turn, it produces mixed results in its impact on educator quality, as measured by student test score gains.[12] Furthermore, teacher turnover often undermines a school's ability to sustain positive effects from professional development.

In 2017, Linda Darling-Hammond and her colleagues at the Learning Policy Institute identified key elements from 35 studies on professional development that successfully improved student outcomes. They found effective professional development:[13]

- is content focused,
- incorporates active learning,
- supports collaboration,
- uses models of effective practice,
- provides coaching and expert support,
- offers feedback and reflection, and
- is of sustained duration.

By designing their own content, schools can ensure that professional development is highly aligned with their school goals and embedded into school operations through coaching, mentoring, or subsequent professional development that reinforces prior content.

CASE STUDY

Building Staff Relationships with a Strong Summer Launch

Each summer before the school year begins, Catalyst Public Schools carries out its annual Summer Launch initiative.

Summer Launch's professional development takes place over a three-week period, with only new school staff in attendance the first week. They are then joined by returning staff for the remaining two weeks. Throughout Summer Launch, teachers engage in activities to get to know one another, plan for the school year in their respective grade-level groups, and engage in conversations around creating an equitable and welcoming learning environment for students.

THREE WEEKS IS IMPOSSIBLE! OR IS IT?

Staff contracts or collective bargaining agreements may pose barriers to devoting two to three weeks to professional development — the length of time necessary for staff members to develop deep bonds, strengthen teaching practices, and align around school logistics. When adequate time is not available for summer professional development, there are still ways to provide staff with opportunities to build relationships:

- Map out professional development times throughout the school year that can be used to engage teachers in sessions focused on relationship-building.
- Have staff sign up to be paired together for scheduled lunches during the school year.
- Encourage teachers with common prep periods to co-work together in one classroom.
- Find or create videos or self-paced activities that encourage staff to reflect on their relationships with other staff members.
- Reduce the amount of time spent relaying logistical information during the summer. Identify as much content as possible that can be communicated asynchronously (e.g., via videos, emails, documents, online curricula).
- During the year, use instructional coaches to help teachers develop their teaching practices through observation, student data analysis, reflection, and lesson planning, thus freeing up time for relationship-building and professional development.

Starting the Day with Sunrise

During Summer Launch, each day begins with "Sunrise," a session at which all staff members gather in the school's cafeteria to engage in team-building activities. On the first day when all teachers are together, Tatiana, one of Catalyst's school leaders and founders, leads the group in a warm-up activity. She instructs teachers to form a circle and pass around two inflatable balls. While the teachers must remain silent, they make use of eye contact to indicate the next recipient. The activity is carried out through non-verbal communication and helps teachers feel more relaxed around their new and returning colleagues.

But Sunrise at Catalyst is not just about games or icebreakers. Teachers often do meditative breathing exercises together, set their intentions for the day, and reflect on how various experiences can inform their relationships with students. Starting each day of professional development (and each meeting during the school year) in this way helps set the tone for the day. Through three weeks of these activities, the staff has the chance to engage with one another in authentic ways that help them grow as individuals and strengthen their connections as a group, while brand new staff members find a sense of camaraderie before the school year begins.

"Honestly, I think my first week with the new staff was very beneficial. It made coming to work the next week with everyone so much easier because I did have some familiar faces to greet me that day," said a new teacher at Catalyst. "I really liked how socially and emotionally focused that first week was."

Gaining Empathy Through Hard Conversations

An important goal of Summer Launch is understanding how to navigate a classroom of students with diverse backgrounds. Discussion prompts help spur conversations between teachers to develop their understanding of different student and staff backgrounds and lived experiences.

Staff members are paired and given a photograph meant to elicit discussion between the two staff members. Most of the photographs depict historical evidence of a racial inequality or privilege. The pairs reflect on each photo, then take five minutes to discuss what thoughts and feelings the photo evokes before trading photos with another pair of staff members and repeating the process.

After each pairing has had a chance to look over several photos, the entire staff reconvenes to discuss the experience as a whole. Staff members share memories and experiences brought up by the images. For example, one white teacher shares that some of their Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC) students and fellow staff members may have had different experiences with schools and other institutions than she has had.

In the process of helping all staff members understand students, they also create moments in which staff can better understand one another. "It's the expectations around the mission and the type of culture and community we want to make – holding each other accountable and making sure that we're having these open conversations," said a Catalyst teacher. "Then having time to implement those things as we start getting ready and we start getting our classroom set."

Learning Through Planning

During afternoon sessions, teachers engage in topics related to instructional practices and planning. Every grade level at Catalyst has two classes — each has a lead teacher and a small group instructor aligned on content, content, rigorous academic standards, and behavioral expectations. To achieve this alignment, grade-level teams use their Summer Launch afternoons to discuss and plan everything from literacy instruction to procedures for lunch time.

The mornings' relationship-building and school culture activities provide teachers with shared language and practices to use when they are navigating the afternoons' collaborative work. For instance, one teacher asked everyone to pause during a debate about classroom norms and said, "I think we need to stop and make sure we're speaking in Discourse II." Teachers were then able to reorient their conversation in line with shared Catalyst's values and keep the discussion constructive and judgment free. (Learn more about Discourse I and II on the next page.)
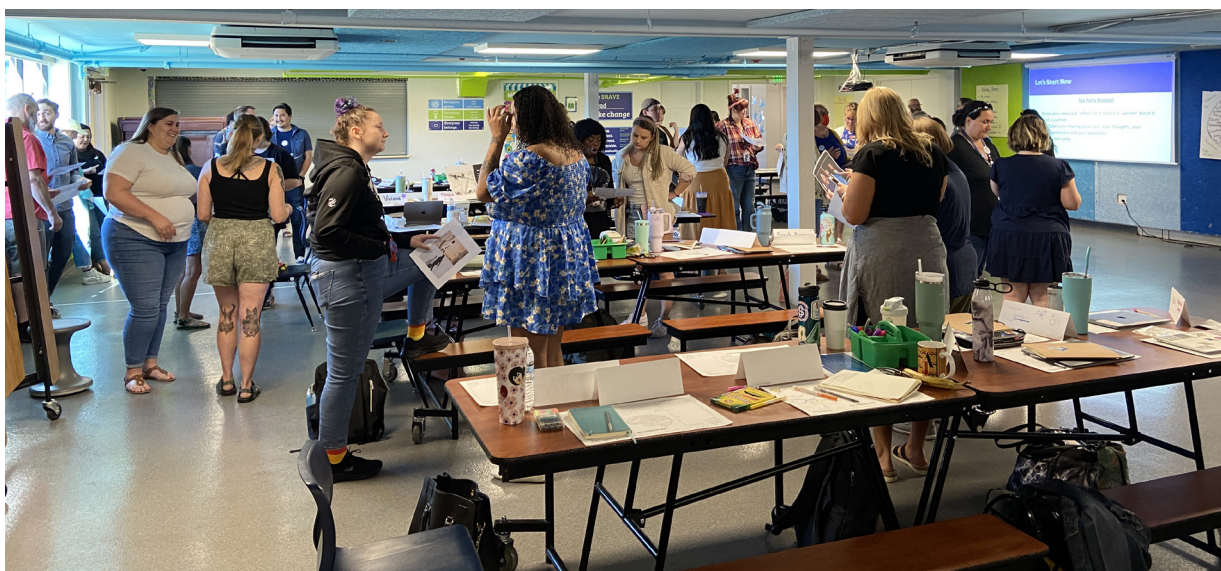
SETTING EXPECTATIONS FOR LANGUAGE

Catalyst uses the concepts of Discourse I and II to set staff expectations for how they engage with each other. **Discourse I** is a way of thinking and talking that replicates existing systems, including those that are unequal and rooted in the power of some. **Discourse II** is thinking and working toward a more equal society. Using Discourse II helps teachers communicate in a more inclusive way.

Discourse I deals with. . . .	Discourse II deals with. . . .
Singular truths	Multiple stories
"The change process"	The desired circumstances
Improving what exists	Changing something significant
Techniques, methods, and content	Learning and school relationships
Symptoms	Causes
The way things are	What could be
Blaming others for not meeting our standards	Questioning whether our standards are hindrances
Discipline and control	Alienation and resistance
Competency	Relevance
The familiar	The uncomfortable
Answers and solutions	Dilemmas and mysteries
Information transfer	Knowledge creation
Ability and merit	Privilege and oppression
Dropouts	Pushouts
Reproduction	Transformation
The work of adults	The learning and experience of students
World-class standards	Re-creating our society
Limited time and ability	Getting started anyway

"The ability to really spend time with my kindergarten team and my co-teacher – getting to know each other, talking about our goals and expectations of each other, getting the opportunity to sit down and answer and ask questions of each other, and talking about the curriculum and plan – that piece I feel like, in itself, is creating a much better environment," said one of Catalyst's kindergarten teachers.

Ending the Day with Fun

Planning sessions at Summer Launch are capped off with recreational activities to give staff another opportunity to enjoy one another as people. The kickball game at Catalyst has become a staff favorite, with teachers happily playing or cheering and watching. As one staff member described the kickball game, "It didn't matter what team you were on, you were still like, 'Yeah, you got it,' and you're rooting for each other… No negativity."

The games offer colleagues a chance to get to know each other in a more relaxed setting, outside of academic prep and planning. Staff members find themselves more relaxed in an exuberant atmosphere. One staff member explained: "Those are the parts that bring me in when it's not the pressure of, 'Oh, do you have the correct answer?' or 'Do you know what you're talking about?' It's when we're just being us and we're being human and we're being comfortable in ourselves."

The connections built and developed through these shared experiences can make it easier for staff members to trust and support one another during stressful points in the year. Catalyst believes that these strong relationships help staff members work together to meet students' academic and social-emotional needs with consistency and care.

Early Effects

Catalyst's focus on building staff relationships has helped them exceed retention expectations, even during the pandemic and "Great Resignation." Catalyst launched in the middle of the COVID-19 pandemic and initially saw staff retention rates similar to other U.S. schools. Charter school teacher retention nationally was 81% in 2021–22,[14] which matches Catalyst's lowest retention rate. On average, Washington State schools had an 89% retention rate in the 2022–23 school year,[15] while Catalyst attained a 91% retention rate. There is no data on charter school retention that year, but it is typically lower than that of other public schools. It is also notable that Catalyst has consistently improved its retention of staff who identify as BIPOC since the school's second and third years. Intentionality around racial equity and social justice has likely helped contribute to Catalyst achieving an even higher retention rate for staff who identify as BIPOC in their fourth year (figure 2).

FIGURE 2. *Percent of Catalyst staff returning each school year since opening in August 2020*

How to Implement This Practice

This section provides step-by-step guidance for implementing Summer Launch, along with accompanying resources to get started.

WHAT YOU NEED

SYSTEMS & STRUCTURES

School
- Distributed leadership that empowers all staff to lead professional development
- Clear organizational mission, vision, and values

District
- Teacher contracts that include summer professional development
- Effective hiring to fill all positions with staff who have shared values of diversity, equity, and inclusion

LEADERSHIP MOVES
- Collect the opinions of staff formally or informally at the end of the school year to identify areas of focus for summer professional development
- Create opportunities for teachers to lead different facets of professional development

MINDSETS
- A growth mindset that is open to learning from peers
- Willingness to be vulnerable and share personal information or stories with others
- Orientation toward equity

RESOURCES

Staffing
- Staff who can also act as teacher leaders or mentors for newer teachers
- Staff who can facilitate sessions
- (Optional) Instructional coaches who support planning, data analysis, and responding appropriately to data

Materials
- Curricular materials
- Facilities for all-staff gatherings as well as private interactions in pairs and small groups
- Documentation to support school logistics, norms, and staff expectations

Budget
- Almost all costs are staff time, which are considerable (see Key Roles and Responsibilities for time estimates)

Steps to Implement

Preparing for Summer Professional Development (Prior Spring)

STEP 1: *Develop Goals*

At the end of the prior school year, school leaders begin planning for summer professional development by identifying three to five primary goals that will drive the planning of professional development sessions. Goals related to teacher relationships, belonging, and inclusion guide all other decisions (see figure 3). In addition to advancing inclusion and equity, goals should be specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-bound (SMARTIE) so that it is possible to evaluate to what degree the goals are met by the end of the two to three weeks.

Schools need to plan how they will collect data to measure each of their summer professional development goals. Surveys and informal interviews are effective for assessing short-term goals. Schools can analyze how results differ between groups of teachers so they know if their equity goals are being met.

> **MEASURING EQUITY AT CATALYST**
>
> Catalyst has hiring and retention goals for staff who identify as BIPOC, and so they track data to ensure they are maintaining equity in their hiring and retention of lead teacher and administrative roles, as well as in the overall staff. Catalyst also collects and disaggregates data from staff culture and satisfaction surveys to make sure they are responsive throughout the year to any gaps between white and BIPOC staff members.

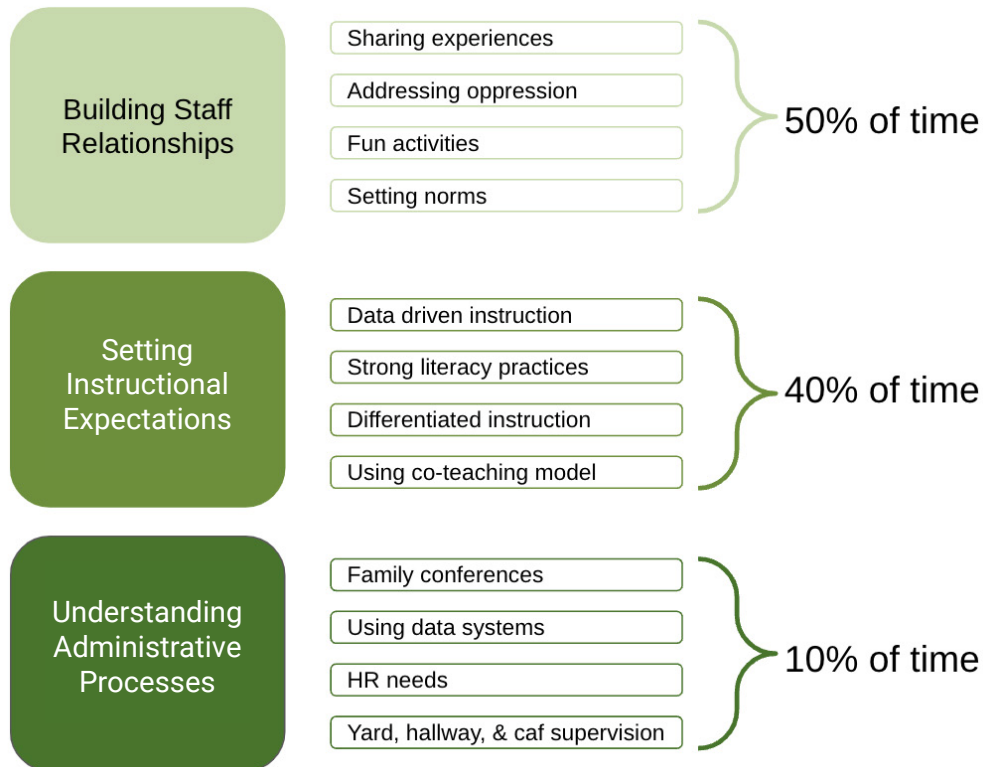**STEP 2:** *Backward-Plan Activities*

Use the goals identified in the prior step to choose topics for professional development sessions.

When considering the order in which sessions will be held, keep in mind the overall relationship-building arc of each day and across the program. The development of strong, flexible relationships between colleagues can support their navigation and negotiation of the information, processes, and structures needed to begin the school year. For example, when new teachers have a stronger connection to veteran teachers, they may be more likely to reach out for support and information.

When planning the order of sessions, it is useful to pay attention to how much time is allocated to each goal area. This will help leaders assess how each goal area is being prioritized and whether it was effective. Figure 3 has an example of how a school may map out three goal areas: building staff relationships, setting instructional expectations, and understanding administrative processes.

FIGURE 3. *Example of goals areas, general session topics, and the percent of time devoted to each*

Building Staff Relationships	Sharing experiences Addressing oppression Fun activities Setting norms	**50% of time**
Setting Instructional Expectations	Data driven instruction Strong literacy practices Differentiated instruction Using co-teaching model	**40% of time**
Understanding Administrative Processes	Family conferences Using data systems HR needs Yard, hallway, & caf supervision	**10% of time**

To strengthen different types of teacher relationships, schools can build in opportunities for staff members to interact in different formations. Table 1 on the next page shows how different types of staff formations can help accomplish different goals during professional development sessions. Using a variety of formations helps staff develop multiple ways of working together to build connections, relationships, and empathy.

TABLE 1. *Different types of staff group formations for sessions*

FORMATION	PURPOSE
Pairs	Highly personal conversations. Staff members can create deep connections with one another. Topics may include an individual's history, experiences with trauma, personal biases, or professional feedback.
Small groups	Less personal but still allows for some individual sharing. Topics may include role plays, reflections on activities, or reading articles.
Affinity groups	Groups based on a shared history, purpose, ideology, or interest. They are most often for marginalized groups such as individuals who are LGBTQ+, Black, first-generation college students, etc.
Co-teachers	Opportunities for detailed classroom and lesson planning. Co-teachers also benefit from opportunities to build their relationship by eating lunch together, role playing classroom scenarios, and sharing personal values with one another.
Grade-level teams	Setting shared norms and standards, unit planning, and student discussions. These are chances to ensure alignment so that students have similar experiences as they move from classroom to classroom.
Departmental teams	Opportunities for vertical alignment so that content is consistently and sequentially taught across grade levels to prepare students for more complex concepts.
Whole-staff	Sharing information with staff. Staff can ask questions and share reflections about activities. These are chances to make sure that everyone shares the same values and understanding about the school's culture.

AFFINITY GROUPS

Affinity groups built around shared identities create opportunities for members to have open and honest conversations in a safe space. For people who identify as BIPOC, LGBTQ+, or other historically oppressed groups, time with other staff who identify similarly can give them space to problem-solve how to work in a world with dominant cultures that hold power. For staff members who are white, cis-gendered, or from a privileged group, affinity groups are a chance to openly address issues of implicit and explicit biases, microaggressions, and power structures that prioritize the privileged. Conversations between individuals from privileged groups can be uncomfortable and challenging as group members confront their roles in maintaining systems of oppression. Those from historically oppressed groups, however, are able to use their time in affinity groups to connect with others with similar experiences and build supportive relationships with colleagues.

Catalyst also assigns self-paced learning for staff and gives them time to complete it during professional development. These sessions typically cover compliance topics, and staff can complete them on a flexible schedule. These self-paced times could also be used for staff to pursue certification requirements, micro-credentials, or other adult learning that supports their work.

STEP 3: *Set Session Objectives*

For each session, at least one objective should be stated. This objective helps attendees know what to expect during the activity and allows the person leading the session to know if the session was successful.

For example, on the first morning of new teacher professional development, the first activity might involve each new staff member cycling through a "speed dating" structure (i.e., taking two minutes to talk before moving to the next person) to share a a first-day-of-school memory. The session concludes with a written reflection and voluntary share-out of what came up for participants during the session.

The objectives for this session might be:
1. Each new staff member will meet all the other new staff members.
2. New staff members will reflect on their first experience in a school as a student.
3. New staff members will reflect on how their experience compares and contrasts with other staff members' experiences.

STEP 4: *Delegate Facilitation to Empower Staff*

Consider how to include as many staff members as possible in leading sessions. While more veteran staff may be able to lead sessions on instructional practices and school culture, newer staff can lead sessions that help staff get to know one another. Having teachers contribute empowers staff members and demonstrates that everyone's voice s valued. School leaders and veteran staff members should make themselves available to staff who are new to facilitating professional development sessions.

STEP 5: *Design the Sessions*

Facilitators should build in plenty of opportunities for staff to engage with each other. If new skills are taught during the session, staff need time to practice them.

It is also important to clarify how each session will benefit staff. For example, session facilitators at Catalyst explain how the games and relationship-building activities of Summer Launch can be integrated into classrooms and the potential benefits they can have for students.

Catalyst staff members expressed that they wanted more time to plan for the school year. Schools may want to consider integrating school-year planning into summer development sessions.

Facilitators should also explicitly plan how to mitigate power dynamics among staff members that may impede full participation in sessions. Consider some of these dynamics that may come into play:

- racial and ethnic identity
- experience level
- school hierarchy
- gender identity
- sexual orientation

STEP 6: *Collect and Analyze Data*

When possible, have a single method of collecting data for multiple goals or objectives. Consider creating one survey that can capture both staff perception and session efficacy (see How to Monitor Success for specific measurement tools). Some examples of methods for collecting data include:

- Notes taken by the session leader(s) as they monitor activities
- Fist-to-Five from participants at the end of a session
- Exit tickets
- QR code survey questions (1–3 questions)
- Interviews with participants after the session

For example, a session with a goal of increasing the number of relationships among staff members can measure success via an exit ticket administered after the session. The exit ticket might ask participants how many staff members they got to know during the session and, using a 1–10 rating scale, how comfortable they would feel asking those staff members for help during the school year.

It can also be useful to have methods for collecting data throughout the school year to assess whether the professional development produced intended long-term outcomes.

STEP 7: *Share Session Agendas and Receive Feedback*

Encourage facilitators to elicit feedback on their session materials prior to summer launch. Doing a practice run with others may improve pacing and confidence for newer facilitators..

STEP 8: *Create Accessible Repositories*

Provide staff with easy access to all professional development materials. Using a cloud-based drive like Dropbox, Google Drive, or Microsoft Teams will ensure that materials are accessible and editable.

Catalyst creates web pages for each summer's professional development with daily agendas and materials.
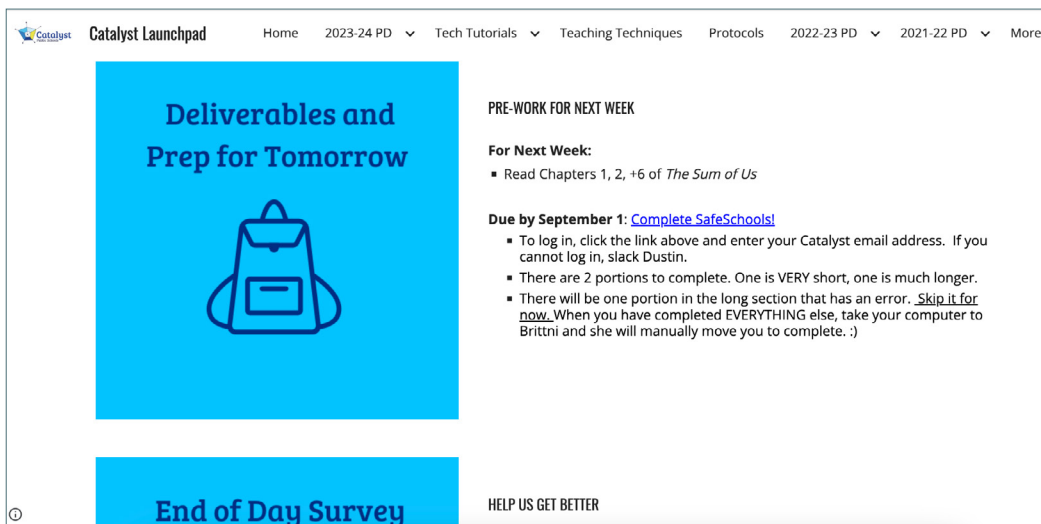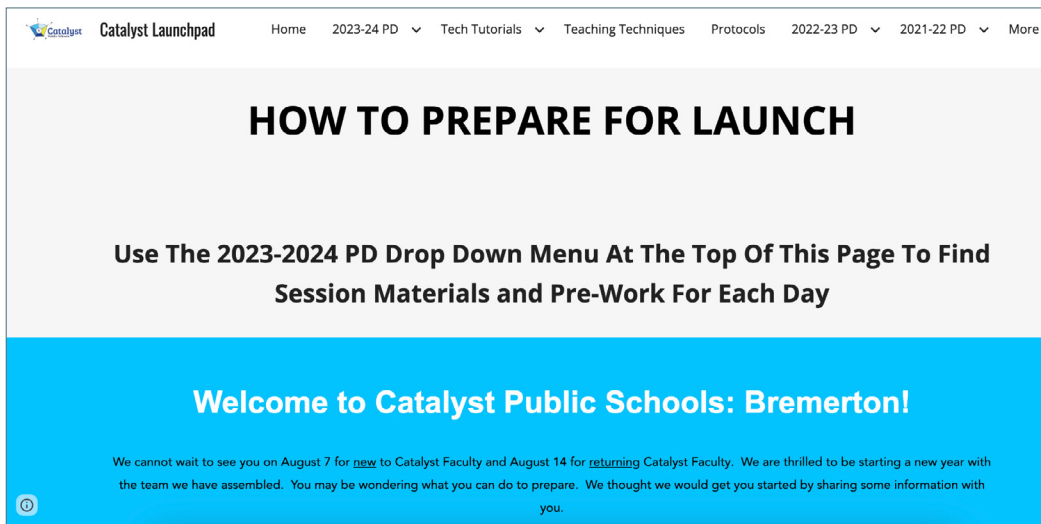
Hold Summer Professional Development

STEP 1: *Set Norms*

Introduce clear expectations and norms for staff interactions at the beginning of summer professional development, particularly because staff have not yet built trusting relationships. It can be helpful to begin summer professional development with a session that reviews norms and includes activities to help staff internalize them. By the end of the session, all staff should be able to understand, remember, and relay norms.
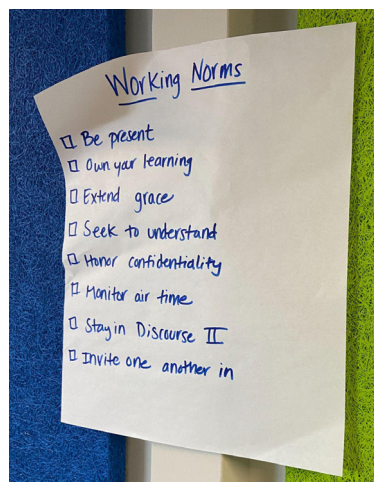
STEP 2: *Offer Opportunities for Fun*

The summer professional development schedule should offer opportunities for staff to build relationships with one another through unstructured activities, such as a happy hour (consider locations with non-alcoholic options), picnic, or potluck breakfast. These fun options bring unstructured interaction into professional development and are times when staff can get to know each other outside the demands of school.

Reflect on Summer Professional Development

STEP 1: *Analyze Data*

When analyzing and reviewing data, ensure that it is disaggregated by years of teaching experience, racial and ethnic identity, and other priority criteria. It may be especially useful to understand how useful sessions were for new versus returning teachers. Analyze data for individual sessions as well as for the whole summer professional development to see how they impacted staff differently. The extent to which the sessions met the overall goals for the summer shows what needs to be improved next summer and what follow-up is necessary as school begins.

STEP 2: *Identify Changes for Next Year*

Ultimately, data analysis will inform future professional development and determine what content requires follow-up during the school year. Once summer professional development is over, school leaders can begin their planning process for the next year by deciding what sessions to repeat, adapt, or eliminate. It is important to consider which sessions will be redundant for returning teachers in the future.

Key Roles and Responsibilities

STAKEHOLDER	ACTIVITIES	TIME REQUIRED
School leaders	Plan the new and returning teacher professional development schedule	20 hours per year
	Design individual professional development sessions	12 hours per month
	Present individual professional development sessions	15-45 minutes per week
Teaching staff	Attend professional development sessions led by school leaders	5 hours the first year; 2 hours in subsequent years
	Align and plan first weeks of school with grade-level teams and co-teachers	1 hour per month
Other school staff	Participate in daily opening and closing activities	15 minutes per week

Potential Barriers

BARRIER	SOLUTION
Some roles are still vacant at the time of professional development.	• Create a plan for on-boarding new teachers when they are hired. • Assign specific staff members to support new hires and engage with them socially throughout the first few months. • Use professional development sessions during the school year as opportunities to loop in content that was covered in the summer.
Staff are misaligned around values of diversity, equity, and inclusion.	• Add additional professional development sessions during the school year to align staff around these values. • Engage all staff in a book study that focuses on these values. Hold regular meetings for the staff to discuss themes and reflections. • Find compelling guest speakers from your school or local community to discuss their lived experiences. Have staff reflect on how these experiences are similar or different from their own as well as how they may relate to the experiences of their students.
Staff do not engage deeply in professional development content.	• Identify veteran staff who can help model engagement for other staff. • Find opportunities for staff to bring their own life and professional experiences into professional development sessions. • Start each morning and afternoon during professional development with fun activities or games that help create energy within the staff. • Ensure that staff have some work time each day to focus on lesson planning and/or setting up their classrooms.

Sustainability

It is essential to create professional development practices that can be implemented consistently over time. Consider the local context and plan for potential barriers to ensure sustainability of summer professional development.

Teacher Contracts

Local teacher contracts can have a considerable effect on the length of summer professional development. Fewer available days means that fewer or less complex goals can be met before school starts. When possible, incorporate summer professional development into staff contracts to guarantee that the necessary days are available regardless of funding changes.

Buy-In

Making professional development mandatory and part of staff contracts is the only way to make it actually happen. Nevertheless, to get the necessary buy-in from staff to work additional days before school starts, school leaders must make the time worthwhile. Staff members need to believe in the goals of the professional development and feel like those goals are met through the sessions. By collecting data from staff members and responding to it, school leaders can make sure that professional development is continually adapting to meet the needs of staff.

Engaging staff members in the planning and implementation of professional development encourages staff buy-in. Staff involvement also strengthens session applicability and appeal.
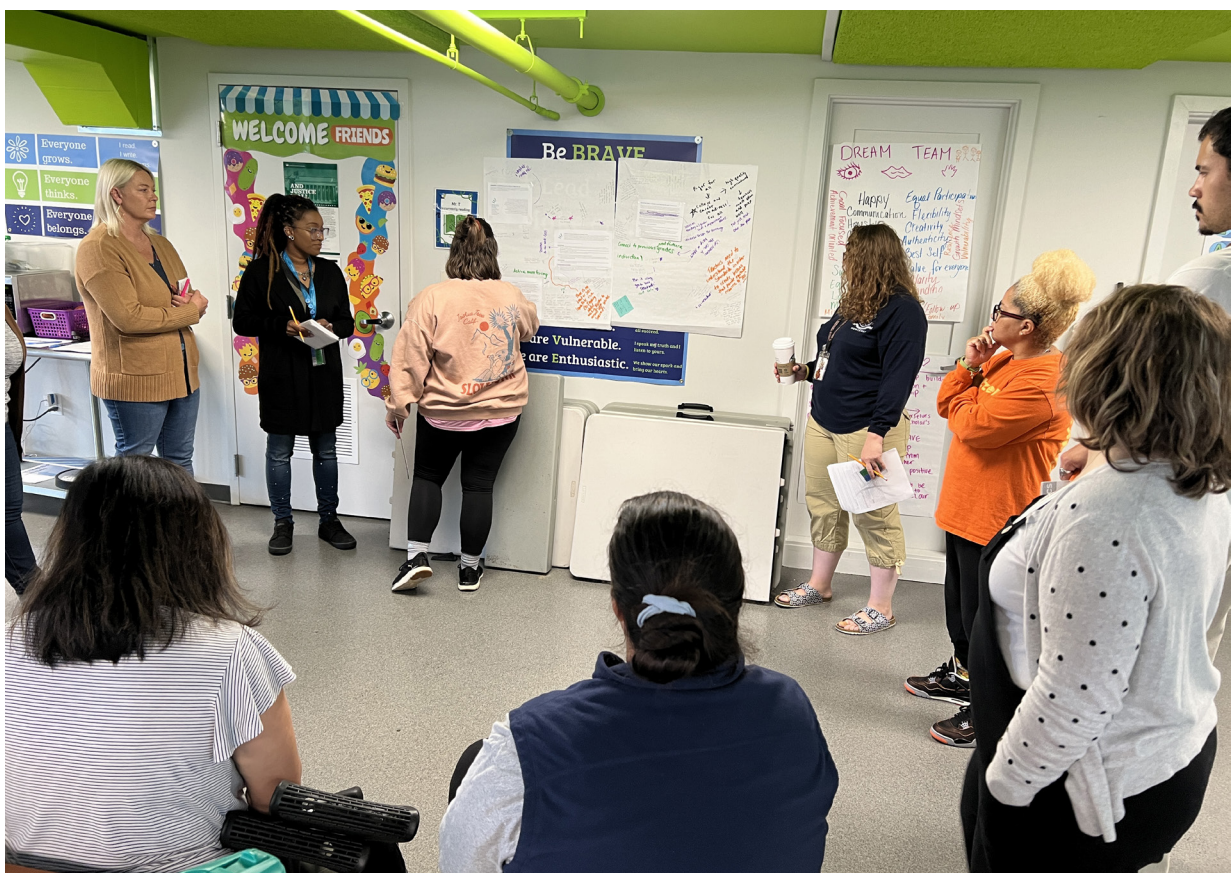
Local Adaptations

It is important to adapt this practice to the local context and conditions.

Fewer Days

If needed, schools can shorten summer professional development to as little as one week rather than two to three weeks. Maintain at least one or two days for new staff to learn about the school culture and begin building relationships with their new staff cohort. Teachers at Catalyst felt a specific bond with staff members who started with them, providing them with a support system throughout their employment.

Even when time is limited, do not underestimate the importance of building teacher relationships. Think creatively about what content can be provided through flexible self-paced learning time, while also understanding that the less time staff have to prepare for the school year, the less prepared they will be to meet high teaching expectations.

Many Veteran Teachers

Just like students, teachers also benefit from differentiated instruction. Assess what topics different teachers can focus on in their practice and create sessions that allow them to improve their skills. Support new teacher integration by creating seating charts with veteran staff sitting with new staff or those with whom they do not already have a strong relationship.

For example, Catalyst assigns several returning teachers with new teachers to be their "cheerleaders" during professional development. The veteran teachers check in with their assigned teacher and find ways to celebrate them. A celebration might mean bringing a donut one morning, making a special sign for their seat, or giving them a shoutout during a session. In this way, even if there are only a few new teachers, veteran teachers learn a little about the teachers they are paired with and connect with them in fun ways. Veteran teachers also wear buttons stating that they are a fan of the teacher they are paired with.

It is also essential to elevate veteran teachers as teacher-leaders by giving them opportunities to lead sessions or mentor newer teachers. Teachers often enjoy having the chance to learn and grow — just like their students — and offering leadership opportunities can help retain staff members.

Larger School

The bigger the school, the more important it is to be strategic about the ways in which staff members are able to build relationships with one another. Give staff members the chance to form a variety of relationships, particularly with colleagues they will not work with regularly during the school year. These cross-school relationships further encourage the continuous and shared work of building and maintaining a strong school culture.

How to Monitor Success

It is useful to create a theory of change to identify the outcomes you want to measure. (See appendix B for a sample logic model that can be adjusted based on your school's goals.) It is important to look at short- and long-term outcomes, as well as implementation effectiveness.

Outcomes

Summer professional development should result in increased teacher retention, teacher quality, and student outcomes. Other intended outcomes will depend on your school's goals for the year. The table below provides several common outcomes and related measures as examples. Select just **one to three** that work for your school.

POTENTIAL OUTCOME	MEASUREMENT TOOL
Teacher retention	Percent of teachers returning the following school year
Teacher quality	• Getting Better Faster rubric (new teachers) • 5 Dimensions of Teaching and Learning • Annual teacher evaluation rubric
Student achievement	NWEA Map (Reading and math), iReady, Lexia, DIBELS, or any other assessment given at least 3x annually
Student behavior	Referrals or detentions. Catalyst uses "Fix-it Tickets" for low-level behaviors.

Implementation Indicators

Monitor implementation indicators throughout the year and at the end of the school year. Progress on these indicators will help make sense of outcomes and adjust processes for the next year. Below are a number of options for measuring implementation.

POTENTIAL INDICATOR	MEASUREMENT TOOL
Teacher sense of belonging, trust, support	Teacher belonging survey (e.g., Gallup, Kelvin, Panorama)
Gaps in teacher satisfaction	Teacher satisfaction survey (e.g., Gallup, Kelvin, Panorama)
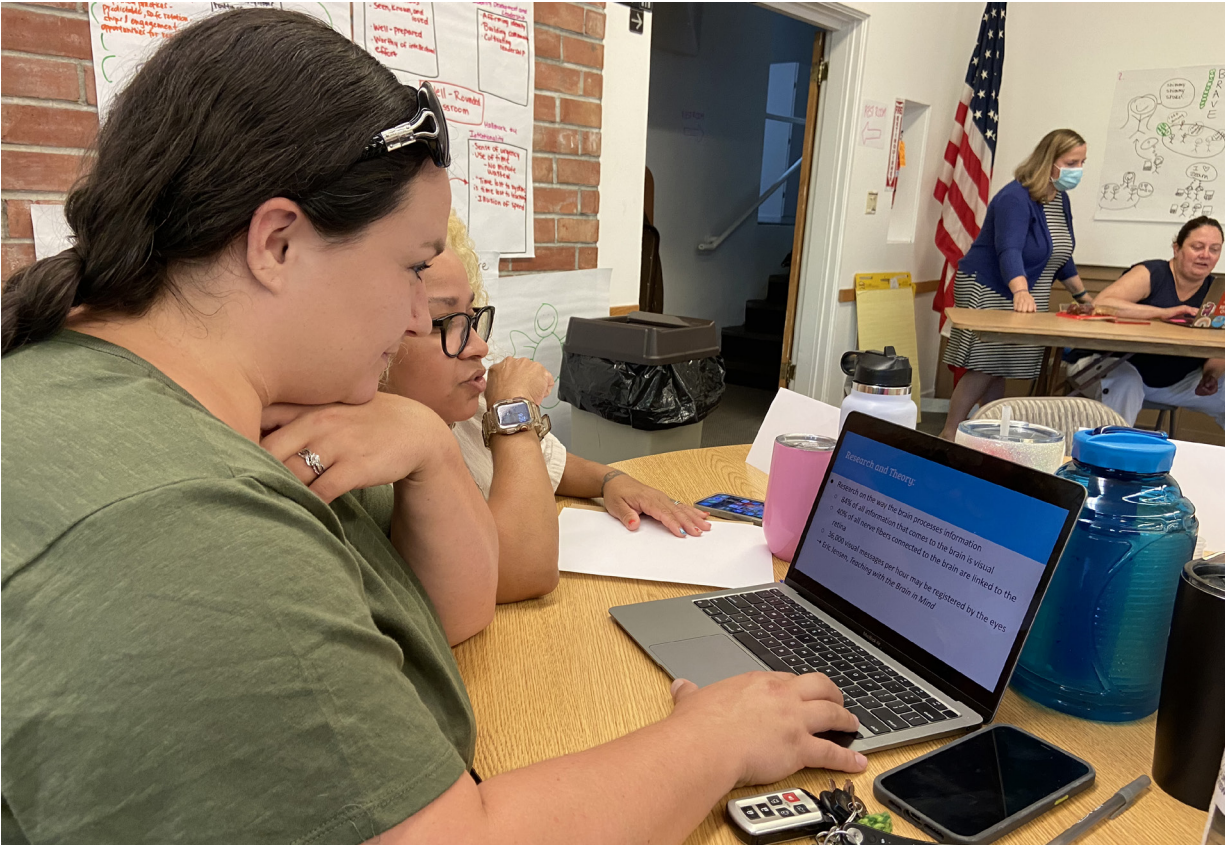
Resources

Planning Materials

- Sample Summer Launch Day
- Sample Summer Launch Schedule
- Sample Summer Launch Preparation
- Tea Party protocol helps group members reflect on topics of interest. Catalyst uses these historical images to facilitate Tea Party conversations about race and intersectionality.

Teacher Evaluation Rubrics

- Getting Better Faster rubric
- 5 Dimensions of Teaching and Learning
- Annual teacher evaluation rubric

Teacher Satisfaction Surveys

- Gallup
- Kelvin
- Panorama

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APPENDIX A:
Profile of Catalyst Public School

Location: Bremerton, Washington
Founded: 2020
Level: K-8 (will include high school as of fall 2024)
Teachers: 29

ENROLLMENT

	2022-23	2023-24
Number enrolled	439	485
Students with disabilities	15.7%	15.5%
Multilingual learners	0%	0%
Foster youth	0%	0%
Low-income students	49.2%	47.0%
Homeless students	0%	0%

Source: Washington Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction school report card

RACE/ ETHNICITY

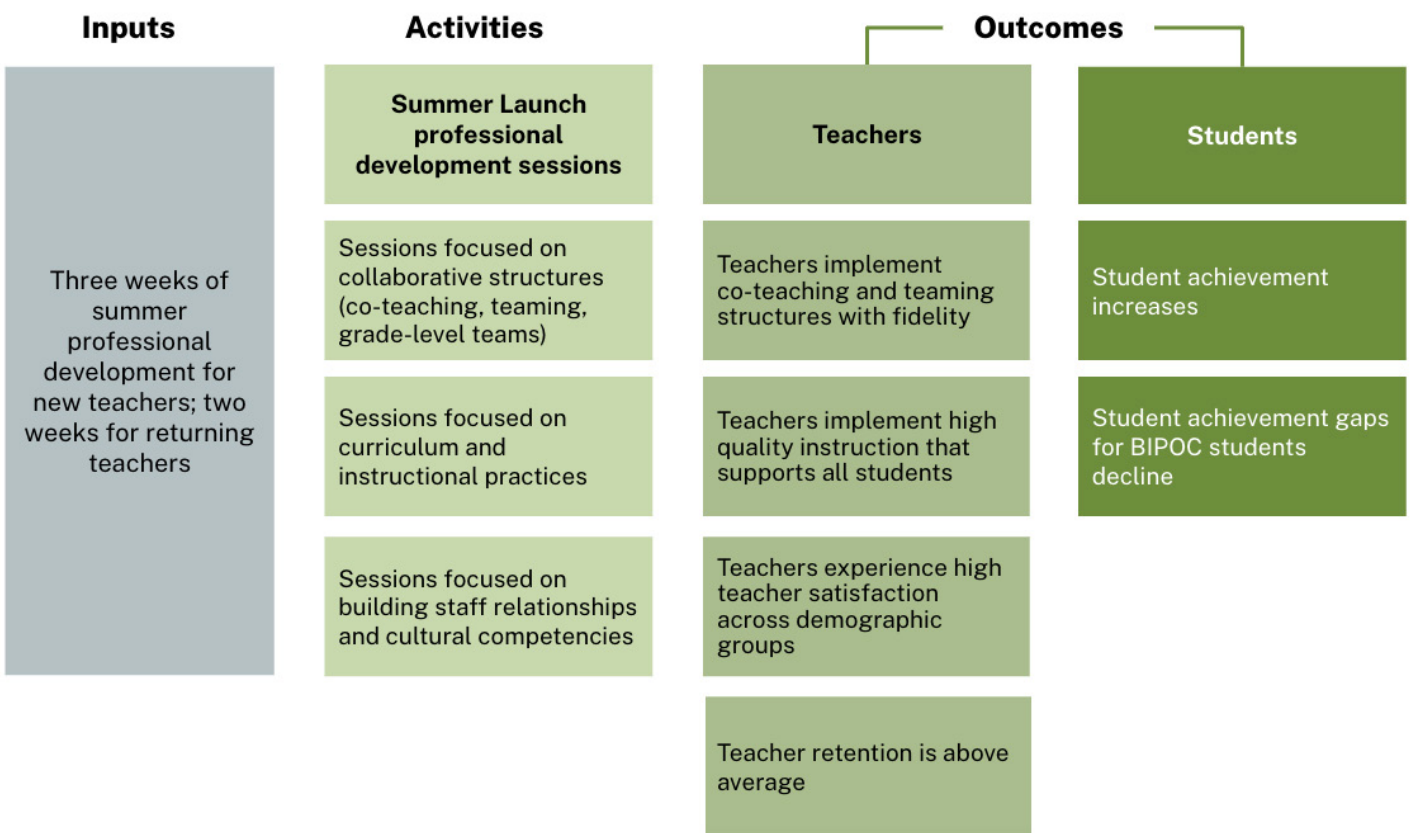|	2022-23	2023-24
American Indian or Alaska Native	0.9%	0.2%
Asian	3.6%	3.9%
Black or African American	8.7%	8%
Hispanic or Latino	15.0%	16.5%
Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander	0.5%	0.2%
Two or more races	12.1%	11,3%
White	59.2%	59.8%

Source: Washington Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction school report card

ACADEMIC PROFILE

	2021-22	2022-23
Attendance	71.1%	73.0%
Percent meeting ELA standards	57.7%	48.8%
Percent meeting math standards	49.2%	45.1%

Source: Washington Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction school report card

APPENDIX B:
Logic Model for Summer Launch at Catalyst Public Schools

Summer Launch

Inputs	Activities	Outcomes	
		Teachers	**Students**
Three weeks of summer professional development for new teachers; two weeks for returning teachers	**Summer Launch professional development sessions**		
	Sessions focused on collaborative structures (co-teaching, teaming, grade-level teams)	Teachers implement co-teaching and teaming structures with fidelity	Student achievement increases
	Sessions focused on curriculum and instructional practices	Teachers implement high quality instruction that supports all students	Student achievement gaps for BIPOC students decline
	Sessions focused on building staff relationships and cultural competencies	Teachers experience high teacher satisfaction across demographic groups	
		Teacher retention is above average	

About the Project

Project Description

This guide is part of a two-year participatory evaluation that concluded in May, 2024. We worked with Washington State public charter schools Lumen High School and Catalyst Public School. The evaluation started with a single question: "What is working in your school?" Researchers Georgia Heyward and Sivan Tuchman worked closely with school leaders to identify promising practices and create research plans to study implementation and outcomes. The result is six guides for each of the practices identified:

- Collaborative Conversations: Skill-Building Restorative Discipline
- Co-Teaching for All: Using Two Educators in a Classroom
- Cultivating Connection: How to Design and Implement School-Based Mentoring
- Social Health: A New Model for Wrap-Around School Services
- Station Rotation: Grouping Students for Individualized Learning
- Summer Professional Development: Creating a Foundation of Teacher Relationships

We also produced a summary report identifying how schools and systems can create learning environments that promote whole-school wellbeing. See that report for a full description of the research methodology.

Author

Sivan Tuchman, PhD is the founder of Datability Education Consulting. Dr. Tuchman is committed to helping her clients use data and evaluation to improve outcomes for all learners. Sivan spent 8 years as a special education teacher before earning her doctorate in education policy at the University of Arkansas, Fayetteville. Prior to founding Datability, she was a researcher at the Center on Reinventing Public Education.

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